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PRESS BRIEFING BY
SECRETARY OF STATE CLINTON, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE GATES
AND CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF ADMIRAL MULLEN
ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NEW START TREATY

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

10:53 A.M. EDT

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, thank you all very much. This is a good day for America and our security. And as President Obama just reiterated, it is one of the highest priorities of the Obama administration to pursue an agenda to reduce the threat posed by the deadliest weapons the world has ever known. President Obama set that forth in his speech at Prague last year. And today, he and President Medvedev reached an agreement to make significant and verifiable reductions in our nuclear arsenals.

Long after the Cold War's end, the United States and Russia still possess more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. We do not need such large arsenals to protect our nation and our allies against the two greatest dangers we face today: nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

This treaty represents a significant step forward in our cooperation with Russia. We were committed from the beginning to reset the U.S.-Russia relationship, because we saw it as essential to making progress on our top priorities -- from counterterrorism, to nuclear security and non-proliferation.

Now, we will continue to have disagreements with our Russian friends. But this treaty is an example of deep and substantive cooperation on a matter of vital importance. And more broadly, it shows that patient, principled diplomacy can advance our national interests by producing real results, in this case results that are good for us, good for Russia, and good for global security and stability.

The treaty also shows the world -- particularly states like Iran and North Korea -- that one of our top priorities is to strengthen the global non-proliferation regime and keep nuclear materials out of the wrong hands. The new START treaty demonstrates our commitment to making progress toward disarmament under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the so-called NPT.

So as we uphold our commitments and strengthen the NPT, we can hold others accountable to do the same. I know that Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen will say more about the details of the treaty, but I want to make clear that we have adhered to the Russian proverb that President Reagan frequently employed, "trust, but verify." Verification provides the transparency and builds the trust needed to reduce the chance for misunderstandings and miscalculations.

President Obama insisted on a whole of government effort to reach this result, and that's exactly what this was. He and President Medvedev met several times and spoke often by phone. Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, General Jones worked closely with their Russian counterparts. Foreign Minister Lavrov and I met in person, most recently last week in Moscow, and we spoke on the phone too many times to count. Assistant Secretary Rose Gottemoeller worked tirelessly in Geneva for many months as our chief negotiator. Under Secretary Ellen Tauscher, who is here with us, joined her at a crucial time to help complete the agreement, assisted very ably by our State Department expert team, including Jim Timbie. Teams of people at the State Department, the White House, DOD, elsewhere worked tirelessly to make this happen.

Let me conclude by saying that I look forward to working with my former colleagues in the Senate. They will be our partners in this enterprise. I know President Obama had an excellent meeting, as he reported to you, with both Senators Kerry and Lugar. And Rose, Ellen and General Jones and others of us have briefed members along the way. I look forward to working toward ratification to bring this treaty into force.

Now it's my great pleasure and honor to turn the podium over to my friend, Secretary Bob Gates.

SECRETARY GATES: This treaty strengthens nuclear stability. It will reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons that both Russia and the United States are permitted to

deploy by a third, and maintains an effective verification regime.

America's nuclear arsenal remains an important pillar of the U.S. defense posture, both to deter potential adversaries and to reassure more than two dozen allies and partners who rely on our nuclear umbrella for their security.

But it is clear that we can accomplish these goals with fewer nuclear weapons. The reductions in this treaty will not affect the strength of our nuclear triad. Nor does this treaty limit plans to protect the United States and our allies by improving and deploying missile defense systems.

Much of the analysis that supported the U.S. negotiating position was provided by the Defense Department's nuclear posture review, which will be released shortly.

As the number of weapons declines we will have to invest more heavily in our nuclear infrastructure in order to keep our weapons safe, secure and effective.

I look forward to working with the Congress to make sure that Departments of Defense and Energy have the funding necessary to properly accomplish this mission.

The subject of America's nuclear deterrent and this treaty carries special personal meaning for me. My professional career began as a junior Air Force Officer under the Strategic Air Command, and my first assignment 43 years ago was at Whiteman Air Force Base, then home to 150 Minuteman ICBMs. Since 1971, I have been involved in strategic arms negotiations in different capacities at CIA and here at the NSC. And I particularly recall the day President Reagan signed the Intermediate Range Nuclear Treaty, which marked the transition from arms control to disarmament. That process accelerated with START and reaches another important milestone with this treaty.

The journey we have taken from being one misstep away from mutual assured destruction to the substantial arms reductions of this new agreement is testimony to just how much the world has changed and all of the opportunities we still have to make our planet safer and more secure.

Admiral Mullen.

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Good morning, everyone. I would only like to add that I, the Vice Chairman, and the Joint Chiefs, as well as our combatant commanders around the world, stand solidly behind this new treaty, having had the opportunity to provide our counsel, to make our recommendations, and to help shape the final agreements.

We greatly appreciate the trust and confidence placed by us -- placed in us by the President and by Secretary Gates throughout this process. And we recognize the trust and confidence this treaty helps foster in our relationship with Russia's military -- a trust complementary to that which the President has sought to achieve between our two countries.

Indeed, I met with my Russian counterpart, General Makarov, no fewer than three times during the negotiation process. And each time we met, we grew closer not only toward our portion of the final result, but also toward a better understanding of the common challenges and opportunities our troops face every single day.

The new START deals directly with some of the most lethal of those common challenges -- our stockpiles of strategic nuclear weapons -- by dramatically reducing these stockpiles. This treaty achieves a proper balance more in keeping with today's security environment, reducing tensions even as it bolsters non-proliferation efforts. It features a much more effective, transparent verification method that demands quicker data exchanges and notifications. It protects our ability to develop a conventional global strike capability should that be required. And perhaps more critically, it allows us to deploy and maintain strategic nuclear forces -- bombers, submarines, missiles; the triad which has proven itself over the decades -- in ways best suited to meeting our security commitments.

In other words, through the trust it engenders, the cuts it requires, and the flexibility it preserves this treaty enhances our ability to do that which we have been charged to do: protect and defend the citizens of the United States. I am as confident in its success as I am in its safeguards.

Thank you.

MR. GIBBS: All right, guys. We're going to take three or four questions here and then let these guys get back to work.

Yes, sir.

Q Quickly for Secretary Clinton, how confident are you of early ratification in the Senate? And if I may ask, Secretary Gates, you mentioned no limits on missile defense. Do you foresee, in the future, engaging with Russia more broadly in any kind of limitations on U.S. missile defense?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Bob, let me say that we are focused on ratification. We're working hard. We're going to engage deeply and broadly with all of the members of the Senate. And we're also informing members of the House as well. I'm not going to set any timetables, but we're confident that we'll be able to make the case for ratification.

In fact, I think if you look at the last three major nuclear arms treaties, the SORT Treaty of 2003, 95-0; START I Treaty, 1992, 93-6; the INF Treaty, 1988, 93-5. So I think when it comes to the goals of this treaty, and as both Bob and Mike outlined the great balance that it strikes -- there should be very broad bipartisan support.

SECRETARY GATES: I would say that we will continue to try and engage the Russians as partners in this process. One of the technical benefits of the phased adaptive approach that the President announced last year is that it actually makes it easier to connect the Russian radars and capabilities to those in Europe. So we think that there's still broad opportunity to not only engage the Russians, but hopefully make them a participant in a European-wide defense capability.

MR. GIBBS: Jeff.

Q Thank you. For Secretary Clinton, first of all, do you believe these reductions are enough? And, second, could you expand a little bit more on what this means for the U.S.-Russia relationship? Is the reset complete?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Jeff, I think that this was, in and of itself a major achievement in our relationship. And equally importantly, it builds to that foundation of trust and confidence that we are establishing between the United States and Russia. This is a very complex relationship, and it's one that we have given a great deal of attention to from the President all the way through the national security team, because we believe that there are so many other areas of mutual cooperation that we can pursue.

Bob mentioned one: We continue to look for ways to engage with Russia on missile defense in a way that is mutually beneficial and protective of our country's security against these new threats we face in the world.

But our relationship coming out of the bi-national commission that President Obama and President Medvedev announced last summer has covered so much ground. And we'd be glad to give you all an in-depth briefing on that because I think it demonstrates that we're not just talking about the big ticket items -- like START, like Iran sanctions, like European security, like missile defense -- we're back in the business of trying to create more people-to-people contacts and more business investment opportunities. So we are very committed and we're going to continue to work together on it.

Q One for the Russian press?

MR. GIBBS: Yes.

Q Thank you. And thanks for doing this and congratulations on your success. I wanted to ask, you are facing a difficult task of convincing the U.S. Congress to ratify the treaty. And the Russians will face the same task. So I assume the process was bilateral, mutually beneficial. Please tell me how the Russian interests were taken into account in the negotiations and final documents.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, obviously, the Russian leadership will be in the best position to speak to the Russian interests and how those were met. But what we both believed as we went through this difficult negotiation was that cutting our arsenals by 30 percent was in the best interest of both of our countries, increasing more confidence between us with respect to our nuclear programs. The kind of decisions that the Russian leadership authorized to be made in this negotiation are clearly, in their view, in Russia's security interests.

And you're right, just as we have to go to our Congress, President Medvedev has to go to the Duma. And I think President Obama has said that he would send Rahm Emanuel to Moscow -- (laughter) -- and we all immediately endorsed that offer. (Laughter.) So if it -- you know, if President Medvedev wants to take us up on it, we're ready. (Laughter.)

Q Madam Secretary, congratulations. Obviously a couple of deadlines were missed on the way to today's announcement.

What were the sticking points and how were they ultimately resolved? And then what's your message to Europeans who are still concerned about the nuclear missiles aimed at them from Russia?

SECRETARY CLINTON: You know, Jake, in any complex negotiation there are going to be points along the way where negotiators have to go back to their capitals; where the negotiators need to delegate in-depth conversations -- you heard Mike Mullen say what he had to do with his counterpart, Bob, I had to talk to my counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, many times, because the Presidents' -- President Obama and President Medvedev's directions were very clear: We want to do this, and we want to get it done in a timely manner.

But it took a lot of work. Just a few weeks ago I dispatched Under Secretary Tauscher to Geneva because we needed to make it absolutely clear that this was a priority at the highest levels of our government. The Russians responded to that very positively. And we began to just work out the last details.

In addition, though, it's important to note that we made a decision that we wanted not just to have the treaty agreed to; we wanted the protocols agreed to. Sometimes treaties in the past have been submitted while the work on the protocols still goes on. But we thought it was important that we really went through all the technical work in the protocols so that when we went to our Senate or when the Russian government went to the Duma, it wasn't just, okay, so what's going to be in the protocols; it was, okay, we can look at the treaty, we can look at the protocols. So that was also some of the time that had to be taken in order to really get to the point where we both felt like we had the package necessary to go to our legislative bodies.

Q And the message to the Europeans? I'm sorry.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, we have consistently conveyed to our European friends and allies America's absolute commitment to our NATO partners and to their defense. The phased adaptive approach that the President concluded was the best way forward on missile defense we think actually makes Europe safer from what are the real threats that are out there.

There is still work to be done in the NATO-Russia Council to build confidence in our Central and Eastern European partners

with Russia. But everybody is aware that that is something that is still ongoing. One of the reasons why it's so significant that the Presidents will meet in Prague is because we want to send exactly that signal, that this is good for Europe as well as for the United States and Russia.

Q Thank you, Madam Secretary. I think the average American, when they hear talk of strategic arms reductions, their eyes glaze over. The two things they really worry about are loose nukes getting in the hands of terrorists, which you touched on, and nations like Iran getting nuclear weapons.

Could you explain how this treaty paves the way for progress on those two issues?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Chip, you know, as the President said in his remarks, we have a vision, a long-term vision, of moving toward a world without nuclear weapons. We are absolutely realistic about how long that will take to convince everyone that this is in the world's interest. But the steps we are taking add up to something that makes a very clear statement of intent.

So the START treaty, it says to our country, the Cold War really is behind us and these massive nuclear arsenals that both our countries maintained as part of deterrence no longer have to be so big; we can begin to cut that. That's not only in our security interests, but it also is a commitment by the United States and Russia toward non-proliferation and toward the eventual goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

The nuclear security summit that the President will host in two weeks -- largest gathering of international leaders probably since the end of World War II in the United States -- devoted to the idea of how do we keep nuclear materials out of the hands of rogue regimes and of terrorists. We come with more credibility, Russia comes with more credibility, having negotiated this treaty.

Then the Non-Proliferation Treaty in May takes it one step further, about how do we bring the non-proliferation regime into the 21st century, when we know, unfortunately, that terrorist groups are seeking nuclear weapons and states that are not -- they don't have the confidence of the international community in their ambitions, like Iran and North Korea, are also pursuing nuclear weapons.

So you have to look at this as part of our whole approach toward non-proliferation.

Q Did Iran come up in the conversation today?

MR. GIBBS: Let me just -- it was a fairly brief conversation finalizing the treaty. President Medvedev mentioned to President Obama that he wanted to speak with him when they met next in the Czech Republic.

Savannah.

Q You mentioned the bipartisan overwhelming majority these treaties have passed with in the past. Is there anything that concerns you about this particular political environment that you won't be able to get those 67 votes? You can opine on health care while you're at it, since we haven't had an opportunity. (Laughter.)

And for Secretary Gates, is the Pentagon uncomfortable at all about the President's go-to-zero campaign, considering we do depend on nuclear weapons for our national security? Thanks.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first, I think that national security has always produced large bipartisan majorities and I see no reason why this should be any different. We've had a very dynamic political debate in our country over health care, which was brought to a successful conclusion this week to the betterment of the American people going forward.

But I don't believe that this ratification effort will be affected by anything other than individual senators' assessments of whether this is in the best interest of American security. And I think that, as you heard from Bob and Mike and you will hear from many other experts in the administration over the weeks ahead as we testify and make the case to the press and the public for this treaty, we are absolutely united in our belief that this is in America's interest. It's in America's interest in the particulars of this treaty and it's in America's interest because it puts us in a very strong leadership position to make the case about an Iran, about a North Korea, about other countries doing more to safeguard nuclear materials.

So I believe that a vast majority of the Senate at the end of the day will see that this is in America's interest and it goes way beyond politics.

SECRETARY GATES: Let me first say a word about ratification from my perspective. There has been a very intense continuing consultation on the Hill as the negotiations have proceeded. Two of the areas that have been of concern in the Senate, among senators, are, are we protecting our ability to go forward with missile defense and are we going to make the investment in our nuclear infrastructure so that the stockpile will remain reliable and safe.

We have addressed both of those. Missile defense is not constrained by this treaty. And we have in our budget, the President's budget that went to the Hill for FY '11, almost \$5 billion for investment in the nuclear infrastructure and maintaining the stockpile. So I think we have addressed the concerns that there may have been on the Hill and so I echo the sentiments of Secretary Clinton, that I think the prospects are quite good.

In terms of going to nuclear -- to zero nuclear weapons, the President has been very realistic in terms of -- you know, when he originally discussed this -- perhaps not in his lifetime. And we realize that other countries have substantial numbers of nuclear weapons; others are attempting to develop them. So we will do this in a realistic way.

But what this treaty does, and some of the other steps -- trying to get control of fissile material, the Non-Proliferation Treaty and so on -- are concrete steps to move in that direction. But I don't think anybody expects us to come anywhere close to zero nuclear weapons anytime soon.

Q Madam Secretary, to what degree in the preamble will missile defense be addressed? And did the Russians in any way, shape, or form insist upon some kind of linkage on future missile defense plans with the United States? And is there any concern that you have about Russian dissatisfaction with the Bulgaria-Romania component that they believe was not adequately conveyed to them before it was released in those two countries?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, Major, if I could -- Robert, could I ask Under Secretary Tauscher to address this?

MR. GIBBS: Sure.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Just fresh from Geneva.

UNDER SECRETARY TAUSCHER: Thank you, Madam Secretary. President Obama and President Medvedev met in July and discussed and had an agreement that this is a strategic offensive weapons treaty, and that there is an inter-relationship between strategic offensive and defensive. But that is the discussion -- where the discussion ended. So I think when you see the treaty and the protocol, there are no constraints on missile defense.

When it comes to Romania, the phased adaptive approach is in phases, as you can see -- 2011, 2015, and 2018 deployments. And we have gone to extensive lengths to brief the Russians. Frankly, the phased adaptive approach has been up on the Web. The Ballistic Missile Defense Review has been up on the Web for weeks and months. So we've gone through extensive briefings with the Russians. We don't pre-clear any kind of conversations we have with allies and friends when we do things with them -- with anyone, including the Russians. But we certainly talked to the Russians soon afterwards, and they knew about the Romanian invitation for the 2015 SM-3 deployment.

MR. GIBBS: Roger, do you have one? Did you have one?

Q Well, yes, I'd like to follow up with the Secretary of State on Iran -- you've touched on a little bit -- and with that, Russia's cooperation now. What does that portend going ahead with Iran and the sanctions and getting them onboard?

SECRETARY CLINTON: We've had very constructive talks with all of our partners, and in-depth consultations with the Russians -- most recently last Thursday and Friday when I was in Moscow. We are working on language. The Russians are involved in -- being consulted on that drafting process.

So we are pursuing the plan that we set forth from the very beginning of this administration -- a two-track process where the first track was engagement, which the President has fulfilled in every way as he has reached out to the Iranians; and the other track of pressure in the event that the Iranians would not engage or refuse to comply with their international obligations.

The recent IAEA report that Director General Amano put out, summarizing many of the questions that raise concerns about Iran's behavior was I think widely viewed as an authoritative source -- not coming from the United States -- that summarized

why the international community needs to move on this second track.

So I believe that you'll see increasing activity in the very near future as we work to bring to fruition a resolution that can muster the votes that are necessary in the Security Council.

Q And Medvedev was going to talk with the President in Prague on this?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, President Medvedev and President Obama have talked about this continuously.

Q He's going to talk to the President in Prague?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I think as Robert Gibbs said, when they are together they talk about this.

MR. GIBBS: We'll take one more from Ms. Thomas.

Q In view` of the pressure on Iran, do you know of any country in the Middle East that has nuclear weapons?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Helen, I've missed you. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you. (Laughter.) We both got honorary degrees.

SECRETARY CLINTON: We did. We were -- Helen and I were out on the new Yankee Stadium field for the NYU commencement last --

Q Don't step on the grass. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yes, we didn't step on the grass, we were very careful. But, you know, she was, as always, in the center of activity.

You know, Helen, one of our goals is to try to move, as we have said, the world toward a recognition that nuclear weapons should be phased out. So from our perspective, that is our goal in fulfilling the President's vision. It is what we are doing with the nuclear security summit, where a number of countries from the region of the Middle East will be present. It's what we're doing with the Non-Proliferation Treaty conference in June. And it remains one of our highest priorities.

So I'm going to reaffirm our commitment to convincing countries that the path of non-proliferation, of lowering the temperature when it comes to nuclear weapons -- which we are doing with this treaty -- is the path they want to be on.

Q Verification is such an important part of this whole process. And for the American people, when they hear you talking about the new treaty, how can you assure them or what would you say to them about your level of confidence in the verification process that says that everyone will be working in good faith here? Secretary Gates?

SECRETARY GATES: Sure. The verification measures for this treaty have been designed to monitor compliance with the provisions with this treaty. So, for example, because their -- our throw-weight of missiles was not an issue, for example, telemetry is not nearly as important for this treaty as it has been in the past. In fact, we don't need telemetry to monitor compliance with this treaty.

Nonetheless, there still is a bilateral agreement to exchange telemetry information on up to five missile launches a year. I think that when the testimony of the intelligence community comes on the Hill, that the DNI and the experts will say that they are comfortable that the provisions of this treaty for verification are adequate for them to monitor Russian compliance, and vice versa.

MR. GIBBS: Thanks, guys.